



Executive Advisory Panel on Forward Together for Children's Services

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ on
Friday, 26 January 2018

Present:

Kate Wheller (Chairman)
Katharine Garcia and Susan Jefferies

Members Attending:

Steve Butler Cabinet Member for Safeguarding

Officers Attending: Nick Jarman (Interim Director for Children's Services), Gary Binstead (Strategy, Partnerships and Performance Service Manager), Melissa Craven (Communications Lead - Children's Services) and Lee Gallagher (Democratic Services Manager).

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Cabinet to be held on **Monday, 16 April 2018.**)

Apologies for Absence

1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Deborah Crony, Byron Quayle and Bill Pipe.

Code of Conduct

2 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

3 The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2017 were confirmed and signed.

Proposed Changes to Home to School Transport for September 2019

4 The Panel considered a report by the School Place Sufficiency Manager on proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy for September 2019.

A detailed summary of the impact of the transport policy on three catchments was explained. There were particular issues faced by the Swanage School, Ferndown Upper School and the Dorset Studio School where children were entitled to free transport to schools further away than their schools even though they were closer. The proposal sought to not provide free transport to schools further away when places were still available in closer schools of the same locality or catchment. If the closer school was full then the policy would then continue to apply to schools further away in these cases. This would provide a consistent approach to dealing with transport eligibility.

The financial impact of the changes would present a range of potential savings from £250k to over £1m depending on the behaviours and preferences of families applying for the schools. Some concern was expressed regarding the potential for behaviours to change with all families applying to the nearest school to fill the places and hope to not get in so they could get free transport to their second preference school. The lower end of the savings would be created if the schools were to fill and then the policy applied to the wider number of children accessing transport to the further

schools.

The policy would not allow people to access free school transport by applying late for school places if they were able to apply on time. This could not be used to circumvent the policy and allocation of places to the schools.

Perceptions regarding reputation, popularity and superiority of schools was discussed, together with the potential difficulties for families with children attending different schools or those without the means of transport. This would generally affect those who were more deprived. However, it was acknowledged that there needed to be a break in the link between families and particular schools. It was confirmed that the Ofsted ratings across Dorset for the secondary schools that were discussed were all good with one that was outstanding. It was confirmed that there would also be the potential for schools themselves to arrange some transport or for families to purchase surplus seat passes.

Support was expressed for a proactive engagement campaign with parents in terms of the lead up to the new policy to ensure that there was a clear message about entitlement and what could and could not be provided. The consultation would be undertaken in April 2018 to be reported to Cabinet in June/July 2018 and then come into place for September 2019 admissions, of which the application timescale was between September and October 2018. There was some reservation about the timing between decision making and application of the policy. Consideration was given to the introduction of the changes from 2020, but due to the pressures facing the council it was accepted that 2019 was appropriate.

In terms of the cost of providing transport, and the savings achievable, it was confirmed that funding would be either reallocated to other critical services, or contribute to the wider financial pressure on the Council itself. Members were keen to be able to articulate the financial change to the public by showing where the funding could be reallocated.

The legal position of the changes was sought, to which clarification was provided that as an authority discretion was allowed to apply a policy that met the Council's needs as long as it was equitable for all schools.

The Panel appreciated that it was a difficult decision to be made, and that it would not necessarily be popular. However, the financial position of the Council, and the need for services for children with limited resources was recognised.

The principle of the change to the policy was accepted, but it was felt necessary to meet with all local members and head teachers of the appropriate schools during the consultation in April 2018.

The possibility of an initial increased number of appeals for admissions and for school transport as a result of a changed policy was acknowledged. There was also the need to ensure that some funding was allocated to support Passenger Transport to provide mitigation regarding the availability of public transport at school times.

With regard to the future, it was explained that more work would be investigated in respect of personalised transport budgets, which could be an possible alternative to the current system.

Resolved

That the principle of a new Transport Policy for those children starting (or changing) school in September 2019 be accepted, which would be consulted upon in April 2018 for ratification by Cabinet in June/July 2018; provided that:

(a) the policy would ensure that where a young person is in a joint catchment area –

they are only entitled to their closest school – subject to other elements of the transport policy. This would be for the 3 areas identified; and,
(b) resources are made available to Dorset Travel to work with providers and commercial companies to develop a network of sustainable transport for families who may continue to access the historical catchment school. This will limit the likely increase in car journeys that may be the consequence of this change in policy.

0-5 Community Offer

5 The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Director, Design and Development, the Strategic Lead for Early Help and the Project Manager Forward Together for Children on the 0-5 Community Offer. A presentation was provided for members which summarised the analysis of the services, pre-engagement survey, and user needs as part of the 0-5 Community Offer with a view to changes and improvements that could be made. The work undertaken to date would contribute to a report to the Cabinet in March 2018 which would move into a period of consultation prior to final decision making in September 2018.

An exciting part of the development would be the use of a business intelligence tool to be able to share information easily between partners to provide intervention for vulnerable people (not just the children themselves) at the earliest possible point. The importance of communications to ensure information sharing worked effectively was highlighted as critical to the success of the tool.

It was noted that the Group would be kept informed of progress, and members welcomed the next phase of the holistic initiative.

Noted

Children's Social Work Recruitment

6 The Panel received a presentation and update on the recruitment and retention plan for children's social workers. The long-term recruitment strategy was developed following additional funding of £1m from the Cabinet to support 20 additional social workers. Action completed so far included targeted advertising, use of a community care jobsite, use of a dedicated jobsite alongside dorsetforyou.gov.uk, use of short video clips, and a quicker appointment process for applicants.

As part of the Department for Education funded programme of Reinvigorating Social Work, improvements were also being made to workloads to reduce the number of cases at any one time to 15, increased staff engagement, and other factors to address the number of vacancies and agency staff being used. Innovate promotions were also being developed including a £1k thank you to staff for successful referrals that led to appointments, and a £2k bonus for new staff who remained in post for longer than 24 months.

Development of apprentices and unqualified applicants was also discussed with a range of options for courses to lead to appropriate formal social work qualifications, together with the supervision arrangements required for them in the work place. Optimism was expressed about the cohort of trainees coming through the system to provide an experienced staff base over time. However, there was a pressure for experienced staff now, which the recruitment strategy would be focussed on.

Noted

Work Programme

7 The Panel considered its work programme for 2018 and scheduled the following items for future meetings:

- April 2018 - Proposed Changes to Home to School Transport for September

2019 (meeting with headteachers and local members)

- June 2018 - Personalised Budgets for Home to School Transport
- June 2018 - SEN Transport: Passenger Assistants Arrangements

Noted

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 12.00 pm